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DISCUSSION

PREScribed VOCABULARY IN COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS

To the Editor of the School Review:

My article in the January *Review* was intended to be "unfavorable" not to Professor Lodge's book, but to the use which I thought it was being put to; and, for obvious reasons, I should never have written it, if I could have been assured of the commendable action which the Philological Association took at Toronto in referring, without mention of vocabulary, the question of uniform requirements to a representative Commission of Fifteen. But I was persuaded that the repeated advocacy in print of "the select list of 2,000 words" as the "corner-stone" of reform was intended to influence the action of the Philological Association; and since I do not believe in the principle of selection of the list recommended, and still less in the training likely to result from preparation for sight examinations with no responsibility for the meaning of words beyond those contained in a fixed list of isolated words, I felt it my duty to protest. I had no doubt that the middle-states people were as genuinely interested in uniform requirements as those who were more severely pressed by the examining colleges; but judging only from printed evidences, I made the mistake of taking them more seriously, perhaps, than they took themselves. In my haste I failed to detect one or two oversights in my paper which I should now like to correct.

Though I recorded Vergil's usage, I occasionally forgot to reckon it in my enumeration, so that once or twice my *H. S. L.* stands strictly for high-school Latin *prose*; and in the last group of words, which are *separately printed and numbered* in the open list, but are not individualized either in the select list of 2,000, or in black type, or in roman type, in Professor Lodge's book, some of my references show that "words not printed at all" in his book was a stronger expression than I meant. Participial forms like *legatus*, *adolescens*, etc., and adverbial case-forms like *quō*, *unā*, *verum*, etc., surely have an individuality distinct from the parent forms (from which I admitted they might be inferred. *Aequitas* and *potens* were inadvertent slips from the previous group).

Even if Professor Lodge's list was made from authors read in nine-tenths of the high schools in this country, that does not commend the principle of permanent prescription of those portions. Words selected according to their usage in the complete works of the authors read are serviceable for readers of prescribed portions as well; but words selected

according to usage in prescribed portions cannot be so serviceable for readers of Latin at will. The objective is Latin at sight.

In trying to avoid an unprofitable emphasis on grammar and syntax, let us not encourage an equally unprofitable emphasis on isolated vocabulary. "Words when isolated (out of relation)," I said in the preface to my first edition, "have less vitality than when read in their context;" and (p. 81) "the best way to acquire a vocabulary is to read and read and read—record important new and difficult words in individual notebooks—but read and remember." Some words that occur oftenest frequently do not get remembered; the words that occur seldom—that last tenth—often require disproportionate attention. As *memory-tests* whether the words best worth knowing *have been* acquired from *live reading*, these lists seem to me to be of most promising usefulness; but to recommend them for initiatory or exclusive service, and to involve them in admission requirements, is, I fear, to expose them, with their inevitable limitations, to grave abuse.

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A SUGGESTED MODIFICATION OF THE MARKING SYSTEM

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Machinists and manufacturers are never inclined to preserve a machine that has done good work in the past when it is no longer capable of doing anything more than run itself without producing the results for which it was built. The case is quite otherwise with social organizations which are, so to speak, the machines by which society does its work. Every society is at first organized in such a way as more effectually to accomplish certain ends than it has been possible to attain by previous organizations. There is likely however to come a time in the history of such organizations when most of the energy of its members is directed toward keeping the society running in its accustomed way with less and less attention to the accomplishment, by the most economical means, of the ends for which the society was organized. This tendency is especially strong in many old organizations and has often been noted by reformers of churches and schools.

These general thoughts are suggested in a concrete form by the article "Elective Subjects in the High-School Curriculum" by Professor Bagley in the November *School Review*. It is evident from his extensive inquiries,